Oaths of Allegiance and Abjuration

As the number of immigrants to Pennsylvania who came from the continent of Europe increased, the government in Philadelphia became alarmed at the great influx of foreigners, especially from the Palatinate in the Rhineland. Therefore, in 1727, it was ordered that the captains of all ships arriving in Philadelphia provide the local court with a list of the names of all the men, women, and children aboard in each case who were not British citizens, and that all non-citizen males 16 years of age or older sign an oath of allegiance to King George the Second (and successors). In addition, in 1729, fearful that James III, a Roman Catholic, would try to seize the throne of England, they also had to subscribe to an oath of fidelity to King George and to abjure the policies of the Pope and the See of Rome. These requirements ended when immigration stopped in 1775 at the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

After the Revolutionary War, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania passed, on April 8, 1785, a statute requiring the registration "of all German passengers who shall arrive at the Port of Philadelphia and of all indentures by which any of them shall be bound servants for their freight...". A list of such passengers provided by the captain of the ship satisfied the registration requirement. In some cases, however, the new arrivals had to take an oath of allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These requirements were discontinued in 1808 when, according to article one, section nine of the Constitution of the United States, the